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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [MARR](#) [IZ](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: KUWAITI YUPPIES LOOK BEYOND THE LONG-AWAITED WAR

REF: A. KUWAIT 1105 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. KUWAIT 1056

[1](#)1. SUMMARY: Where reftels analyzed how the US-led war against Iraq might affect Kuwait's political and economic landscape in general, this cable examines perceptions of a specific sector of society -- young, upwardly-mobile, democratically-minded professionals. At an informal dinner, EmbOffs met with a group of thirty-something Kuwaiti men to discuss the war's impact on their country, now and in the future. Like others in their demographic, they have lived nearly half their lives under the shadow of a brutally hostile neighbor. Most of them wanted this war, but now that it is here, what next? As Saddam's regime nears its end, these potential leaders of tomorrow were eager to voice their opinions on a wide range of topics, from the war to the economy to Kuwait's relationship with the United States and its growing feeling of isolation in the Arab World. END SUMMARY.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

[1](#)2. ConOff, EconOff, and PolOff met March 27 for dinner with ten liberal, pro-Western Kuwaitis to discuss their views on how the war could affect Kuwait politically (ref A) and economically (ref B). This gathering included lawyers, businessmen, investors, and media professionals, each financially well off by American standards (BMW's and Jaguars in the driveway), but none members of Kuwait's ruling family or upper elite class. A few studied in the US and each graduated from Kuwait University, where they launched and remain active in a liberal student group called the "Democratic Circle." All but two arrived in Western dress, the pair in dishdashas (traditional robes) quickly discarding their headgear to better fit in.

[1](#)3. Their views on the conflict ran the gamut from Rambo-esque to anti-war, but all agreed Saddam must go (one hawk asked "Why it had taken us so long," while even the lone dove was in favor of his removal). Each participant appeared well-informed and well-engaged in television coverage of the war, viewing several hours of news a day. Each said he watched a variety of television sources, from Al-Jazeera, Abu Dhabi TV, and other Arabic-language channels to CNN, Fox, BBC, and SkyNews. Most were critical of Al-Jazeera, but at least one praised it for carrying information otherwise not available. Most were also critical of CNN, stating that it was repetitive and had lost much of its edge since the Gulf War. All expressed a vested interest in the outcome of this conflict.

WAR'S TOLL

[1](#)4. While this group readily acknowledged the economic prospects for Kuwait following Iraq's liberation (ref B), their primary interest centered on the political ramifications -- namely, the impact this war was having on Kuwait's relations with other Arab states. Each participant voiced concern over Kuwait's growing isolation in the Arab world. Some noted with bitterness how no Arab nation had stood up for Kuwait while Iraq was launching missiles into its territory. (Note: Local press reported March 30 that Saudi Arabia and Morocco finally deplored Iraq's actions, but only after a missile actually struck a Kuwaiti target the previous day.)

[1](#)5. Others complained even more acrimoniously how Kuwait routinely lent a money-laden hand to its Arab neighbors, yet none were standing behind Kuwait in its hour of need. As one participant said, "We've given millions, for what?" Others questioned the value of the Arab League, one calling it a "burden to Kuwait." Some said they would not be surprised if the GOK refused to attend the next Arab League meeting. (Note: During the March 31 session of Kuwait's National Assembly, Members of Parliament railed against Arab League Secretary General Amr Mousa and the several Arab countries

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that refused to issue statements denouncing Iraq. A proposal now before the National Assembly would require parliamentary

approval of any further financial aid to Arab states. End note.)

ODD MAN OUT

16. Most participants agreed that lack of Arab support went beyond envy over Kuwait's oil wealth to fears of a significant challenge to the status quo. They singled out Syria, Egypt, and Libya as countries where autocratic leaders were especially fearful of a new order, one in which the USG established Iraq as a democracy to be followed by other states in the region. They agreed Kuwait was hated for its support of the United States, but even more so for being a democracy. (Note: An interesting dichotomy exists here, in which Kuwaitis pride themselves on the one hand for being democratic, while acknowledging on the other that women and most men still do not have the right to vote. End note.)

17. Even within Kuwait, the status quo was coming under threat, they said. One participant told how he and other members of the "Democratic Circle" were branded as communists and atheists by the Islamist student group as a way to discount their liberal ideas. Even so, these ideas were permeating Kuwaiti society, especially among the younger, media savvy "Internet generation," another participant said. Nevertheless, the participants agreed that the Islamists on campus -- as well as in larger Kuwaiti society -- remain better organized and funded than their liberal counterparts, with a clear and singular message (religion) that is easier for many to grasp. Recent gender segregation at Kuwait University demonstrates the potent Islamist influence.

LOOKING AHEAD

18. The participants expected economic opportunities to follow Iraq's liberation, especially in nearby Basra, where some of them have relatives. Such a development, however, did not seem a central focus of this group, in comparison to their older, more established, and better connected compatriots, such as from the ruling al-Sabah or large merchant families. Instead, they spoke of strong economic possibilities in Kuwait. They said there was much money to be made in real estate, oil, and other investments. They noted, however, that most Kuwaitis continue to think along short term lines, not willing to risk longer term investments. They agreed with EmbOff that such thinking was hurting Kuwait's development, but did not expect to see this behavior change any time soon, even after Iraq opens up for business.

19. Whatever happens next, this group hoped that the US military would maintain a strong presence in the country. One participant said that at least for the foreseeable future Kuwait will need protection against historically expansion-minded countries like Iraq, Iran, and even Saudi Arabia. Others stated America has proven it is the only country Kuwait can really trust. They tended to agree the safety provided by the United States far outweighed the condemnation and isolation from their Arab brothers.

110. One area where this group fell in line with the majority of their countrymen was on Middle East peace. Despite being educated, open-minded, and fully aware of how the Palestinians had twice sided with Saddam against Kuwait, members of the group were still critical over what one called "America's unquestioned support" for Israel. They were not willing to admit that at least the USG was working to resolve this impasse, when most Arab nations are not, and trying to engage them in an objective discussion on this topic seemed a non-starter.

COMMENT

111. While these remarks admittedly reflect the opinions of a small group of Kuwaiti men, they can also be seen as incorporating a wider view held by a segment of society that figures to be among the economic, legal, and perhaps even political leaders of tomorrow. Their ardent support for the United States -- not only its military might, but more importantly its democratic ideals -- in face of the wrath this relationship garners from Kuwait's Arab neighbors, is encouraging; we will endeavor to nurture it.

JONES